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dynamo joe™

Dear Tabby

C/O FIRST COMICS
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Welcome to the first issue of **Dynamo Joe**!

Now, where were we?

The setting is sometime in our future. Earth – now called TERRA – has explored and colonized to its heart's content and has loosely organized into a confederation, with Terra as the focus. The planets farthest from Sol - the Outer Planets - feel the ties less than the Inner Planets, a cause for some friction within the Confederation.

There are two other strong races/nations within our galactic sector: the cat-like *Tavitans*, their home planet is Londree, and the *Imperium* — a benign master race of super-soldiers ruled by the enigmatic Magna Khan.

Some ten years before the events chronicled herein, planets near the Galactic Rim found themselves under attack by an unknown, apparently extra-galactic *Enemy*. Planets in the path of this foe were devoured. Moreover, the Enemy appeared to be tunneling through the Orion arm of our galaxy in an obsessive straight line path. In that path lay both Londree and Terra.

No communication could be established with the Enemy, despited repeated attempts — the Enemy's very nature could not be learned. Nevertheless, such a threat to Terra could not be tolerated, so the pride of the Confederation, the Central Fleet, flew forth to engage the Enemy while it was still relatively close to the Galactic Rim.

The ensuing disaster became known as The Rim Battle Massacre. Fully half of the Fleet was destroyed in that engagement. The massacre might have been even worse were it not for the actions of Admiral Akira Shimamura, the head of supply and ordnance who took command following the decimation of the High Command. With a series of brilliant tactical maneuvers, Shimamura disengaged the Fleet and then fought a three year delaying action to give Field Marshall Sergei Ippolitov time to set-up defenses around the gas-giant planet Fergusson.

Military assistance pacts signed before the invasion were invoked and the *Alliance* was created, with Shimamura being named Supreme Commander of the combined forces. The Tavitans responded generously, but the Imperium sent only a token force of warriors generally far below their usual quality. In addition, the Outer Planets that were no longer threatened were increasingly reluctant to lend aid for what they considered "Terra's War."

For three years, the Alliance was able to hold the Enemy at Fergusson. Fergusson also saw the first extensive use of the *Dynamo* class battlesuit: a giant robot, humanoid in configuration so as to adapt to a variety of terrain, including deep-space. Robosoldiers are over 70 feet high, weighing more than 120 tons, nuclear-fusion powered with a variety of armament. The suits had a crew of two: pilot/gunner and navigator/technician. The robosoldiers and crews were the "grunts" of Orion War, expected to fight and die and perhaps never know why. **Dynamo Joe** is the nickname of one of these units, with its crew of Sergeant Elanian Daro (Imperium) and Private Pomru (Tavitan). When we first met them, the Enemy had finally cracked the defenses of Fergusson and the Alliance bases were being over-run. In the Dunkirk-like situation, the DJ crew found itself left behind on Fergusson 8, one of the gas-giant's planetary moons. They soon picked up two other stragglers: Anda Warren, a civilian journalist, and Lieutenant Alexander Patton Price, a downed fighter pilot. They also learned that the High Command intended to turn the gas-giant into a sun in an effort to destroy the Enemy — an effort that would certainly incinerate the little band.

Jerry-rigging an escape platform, the DJ crew got off Fergusson 8 and managed to survive by interposing the moon between themselves and the planetary blast. However, they were still stranded far from their own lines, with only limited life-support facilities. Worse, the Enemy had also survived.

This is when DJ came across the Corregidor, a super-dreadnought of the Central Fleet thought destroyed during the Rim Battle Massacre years ago! Yet here it was before them, adrift in space with a dormant Enemy war machine wedged in it.

That made it twice strange, as the war machines had always disintegrated when disabled. If they could bring one intact back to their own lines, the Alliance might be able to learn *what* they fought!

On boarding the Corregidor, the DJ crew learned that all the Corregidor's officers had been killed in a mutiny and that the surviving crew had split into two armed camps along the Outer/Inner Planets line. A civil war had been raging within the Corregidor all this time. Further, Sergeant Daro was able to determine that the civil war was actually an *experiment* being run by the Enemy from within the supposedly dormant war machine. Thanks to the ship's doctor on the Corregidor, Daro learned the Enemy's true nature — information vital to the Allied cause.

In the ensuing battle, the Enemy war machine was destroyed and the Corregidor crew freed from its subconscious control, but not before the Dynamo suit was heavily damaged. Here, Lieutenant Price sacrificed his life to protect that of the civilian, Anda Warren. With the heads of the two formerly warring crew factions — Tannemara and Ensign Matt Zell — now cooperating, the Corregidor was able to limp back to its own lines, and the Alliance began to analyze the precious data.

That was some months ago and, as we begin our story, **Dynamo Joe** has been assigned to a new unit.

NEXT ISSUE: The crew of **Dynamo Joe** gets involved in the most important military operation of the war - *Boldshot Brimfire*, from the art crew of **Doug Rice**, **John Ostrander**, **Brian Thomas** and **John Nyberg**.

And there *will* be a test later!

—John Ostrander

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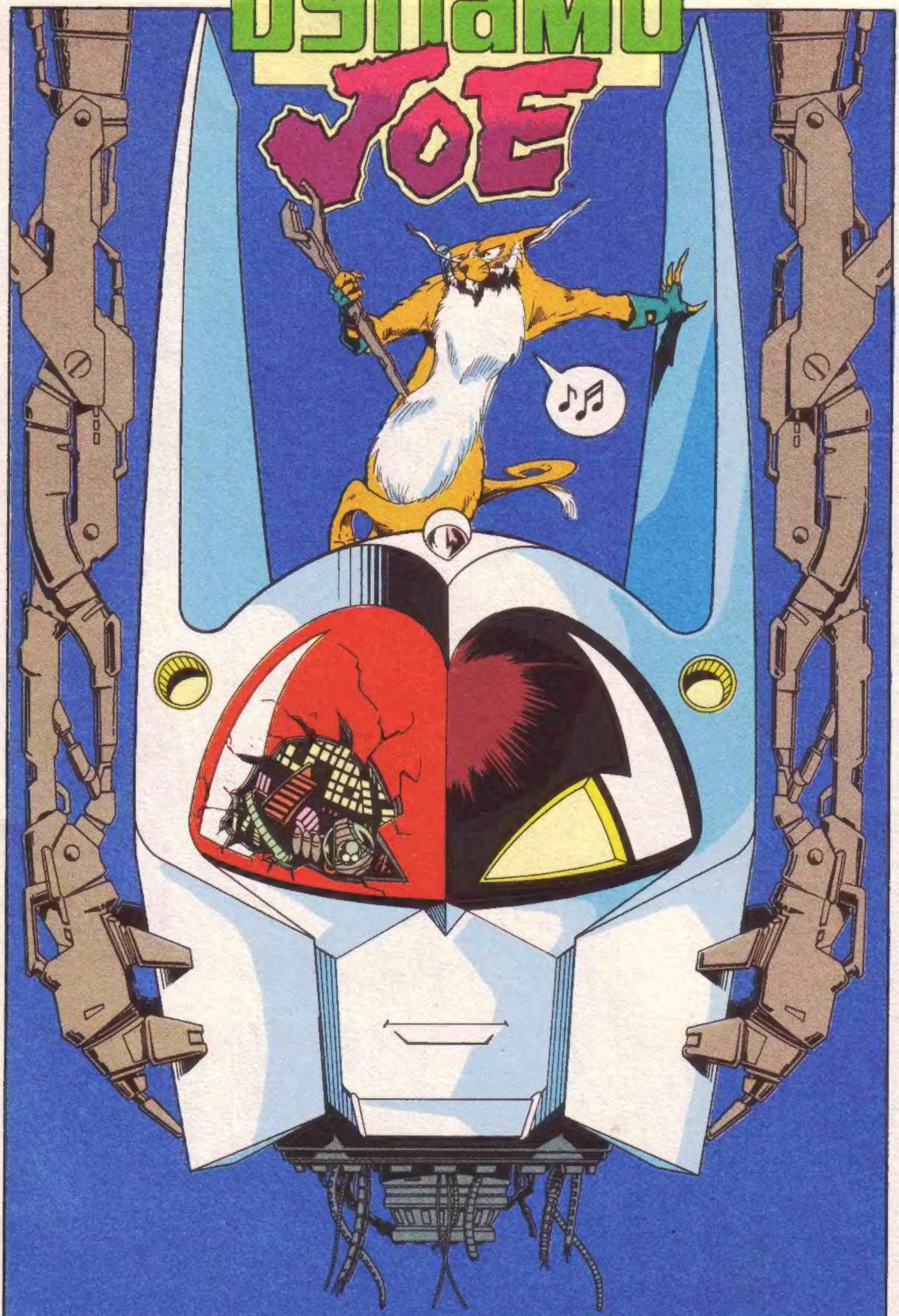


TERRAN MOBILE BASE/HARBOR SIX, CODE-NAMED SIGMA, A DEEP SPACE STATION, FAR FROM THE NEAREST INHABITED SYSTEM.

ODIN TO TROIKA. GRAPNEL FULLY DEPLOYED-- PREPARE TO DISENGAGE. DOZVIDONIA, FIELD MARSHALL.

SPACIPO.

FORGED OF BONDED ASTEROIDS, SIGMA IS THIRTY MILES WIDE, HOUSES FIVE MILLION TROOPS--INCLUDING STAFF, BASE PERSONNEL, AND SUNDRY CIVILIAN TECHNICIAN AND MEDICAL TEAMS--AND IS EQUIPPED WITH WARP-DRIVE FOR THE RAPID DEPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT OF THE ALLIANCE FLEET.

BACK TO BASE SIX

THE ALLIANCE: THREE GALACTIC RACES--THE TERRAN-DOMINATED CONFEDERATION, THE CAT-LIKE TAVITANS, AND THE ENIGMATIC IMPERIUM. FOR OVER TEN YEARS THEY HAVE FOUGHT A SERIES OF LOSING BATTLES AGAINST A SEEMINGLY UNBEATABLE AND, UNTIL RECENTLY, UNKNOWABLE ENEMY.

DOUG RICE-CREATOR/PLOT/PENCILS JOHN OSTRANDER-SCRIPT
JOHN NYBERG & BRIAN THOMAS-INKS
WILLIE SCHUBERT-LETTERS RICK TAYLOR-COLORS
RICK OLIVER-EDITOR

ABOARD THE TROIKA-FIELD MARSHALL (CONFEDERATION) SERGI IPPOLITOV AND LORD GRHAOOL, OF THE TAVITAN SCIENCE COUNCIL.

THIS... RELUCTANCE TO SHARE SO VITAL A DISCOVERY ABOUT OUR COMMON FOE - THIS I DO NOT UNDERSTAND, YOUR, LORDSHIP.

RRRR. WE AWR NOT, AS A RRRULE, A WARLIKE PEOPLE, GENERAL.

WE FIND IT... 'DISTASTEFUL' TO PUT THE FRUIT OF OWR THOUGHTS INTO WARRR.

A CERTAIN PERCENTAGE OF YOUR PEOPLE FIGHT IN THIS WAR ALREADY, YES? GOOD TECHNICIANS, FINE WARRIORS.

ONE OF THE CREW OF THE BATTLESUIT THAT BROUGHT HOME THE CORREGIDOR, WHICH IN TURN REVEALED SO MUCH--WAS HE NOT A TAWTAN? YOU'D USE THE FRUITS OF YOUR FLESH BUT NOT YOUR THOUGHT IN OUR COMMON STRUGGLE?

MMMM. YES YOU REFER TO POMRU, OF COURSE. FIRST 'HERO' IN THIS WAR TO COME FROM LONDRGE.

SOME OF OWR YOUNGLINGS AWR EXCITABLE BY NATURE. THE YOUNG OFTEN SEEK 'ADVENTURE' BEFORE THEY MATURE FULLY.

UNDERSTAND, GENERAL--OWR RRELUCTANCE IS NOT A REFUSAL. WE MERELY SEEK AN AUDIENCE FIRRST WITH THE SUPREME COMMANDER TO VOICE OWR MISGIVINGS.

AND WHERRRE IS THE ESTIMABLE ADMIRAL SHIMAMURA?

ADMIRAL'S APOLOGIES, SIR. HE'LL JOIN YOU AT THE WAR WALL.

SO. THIS WAY, YOUR LORDSHIP.

BUT COME SOON, AKIRA, OLD FRIEND, OR I SHALL HAVE TO EITHER BITE MY TONGUE OFF, OR GO TO WAR WITH OUR 'ALLY'!

THE *WAR WALL*. HERE ALL MOVEMENTS OF OUR FORCES AND OF ENEMY CAN BE TRACED AND ANALYZED. FUTURE ENGAGEMENTS CAN BE *SIMULATED* AND PROJECTED ALSO.

IF ONE HAS THE NECESSARY *DATA*, GENERAL, YES? YET, FOR TEN YEARS WE LACKED SO MUCH *BASIC* INFORMATION.

WHO ARE THEY? *WHAT* ARE THEY? *WHY* DO THEY ATTACK? NOT *CONQUEST*. THEY MERELY *ADVANCE* IN AN OBSESSIVE STRAIGHT LINE. *WHY?*

DID THEY NOT *DEVOUR* UTTERLY ANY PLANETARY BODY IN THEIR PATH, WE MIGHT BE INCLINED TO LET THEM PASS UNHINDERED THROUGH THE GALACTIC ARM.

IF YOUR PLANET OF *LONDRGE* AND THE *TERRAN* PLANETARY SYSTEM DID NOT LIE IN THE PATH WE MIGHT HAVE ANYWAY. AS IT IS...

DATA COM ONE! PLEASE TO SHOW OUR DISTINGUISHED GUEST LATEST REPORT ON ENEMY!

AVAILABLE DATA INDICATES ENEMY IS ON THE MOVE AGAIN, SWINGING *AROUND* FERGUSSON.

PROJECTION-- PAST DATA-- INDICATES THAT ONCE THIS MANEUVER IS COMPLETED, THE ENEMY WILL RETURN TO ITS ORIGINAL COURSE.

HUH. FOR *THREE YEARS* WE HELD THEM AT FERGUSSON, LORD GRHAOOL. *WITHOUT* YOUR COUNCIL, WITHOUT YOUR *SCRUPLES*.

WE *USED* THE FRUIT OF *OUR* THOUGHTS... AND OF OUR *BODIES*. WE BLED AND DIED BY FERGUSSON AND, IN IN THE END, TRANSFORMED THE GAS-GIANT INTO A *STAR* IN AN EFFORT TO SLAY OUR *COMMON* FOE.

LESS THAN ONE YEAR LATER, THEY COME AT US AGAIN. WHAT DID WE BLEED AND DIE FOR, SIR? *HM?*

"YOU GAINED *TIME*, GENERAL. AND *KNOWLEDGE*. THAT *DYNAMO*-CLASS BATTLESUIT OF POMRU'S--IT WAS ABLE TO DISCOVER THE ENEMY'S *TRUE NATURE*, DID IT NOT, DATA COM ONE?"

"YES, EXCELLENCY. *ANALYSIS*--ENEMY ARE REALLY *MICROSCOPIC, SINGLE-CELLED ORGANISMS*, AKIN TO AMOEBAE, LINKED TOGETHER VIA SUB-SPACE TRANSMISSION TO FORM A *SINGLE GROUP MIND*."

THEORY--WHAT *ONE* CELL KNOWS, THE *GROUP MIND* KNOWS.

ONE--INDIVIDUAL "CELLS" CAPABLE OF INFECTING BLOODSTREAM AND--PROVIDED SUFFICIENT ORGANISM MASS NEARBY TO MAINTAIN CONTACT WITH GROUP MIND--CAN DOMINATE AN INDIVIDUAL'S SUBCONSCIOUS.

TWO--THE SUB-SPACE BOND THAT LINKS THE CELLS IS *PSIONIC* AND CAN TAP INTO *OUR* MINDS AS WELL, WITHIN CERTAIN PARAMETERS. *EXAMPLE*--THE ENEMY USES *OUR* VISUAL IMAGES TO *SEE*, HAVING NO OCULAR FACILITIES OF ITS OWN. CUT OFF FROM THE GROUP MIND, THE INDIVIDUAL CELLS QUICKLY DIE.

IT EXPLAINS MUCH. THEY DRAW THE DESIGNS FOR THEIR OWN HUGE WAR MACHINES FROM AWR SUBCONSCIOUS, ATAVISTIC FEARS.

WE HAVE DUBBED THE BEINGS *MELLENARES*, 'WE-WHO-AWR-ONE'. SOMEWHAT AMUSINGLY, IT IS ALSO THE NAME OF AWR *MATING* RITUAL.

ANY MIND THEY CANNOT 'TAP' INTO, THEY CANNOT *SEE*. AS WE INDICATED, THE COUNCIL HAS FOUND A WAY TO GENERATE AN ENERGY FIELD THAT EFFECTIVELY *BLINDS* THE MELLENARES.

FIRST NOTES

Once a month, for no particular reason, they let me have a whole page where I can write whatever I want. Well, *almost* anyway. We have certain editorial rules that even I can't break. Not that I would want to. I was one of the people responsible for implementing them in the first place. I guess I can write *about* anything I want; but my choice of words is modestly restricted.

No, this isn't another treatise on the evils of censorship in comics. Being an editor, I'm a great believer in certain forms of censorship. I cut out a word here, a phrase there, and expletives all over the place. That's part of *my* job.

It's also my job to make recommendations on what books we should or should not publish. Sometimes I make good recommendations; other times, not so good. (I thought **American Flagg!** was too eccentric and would only appeal to a very narrow audience.) Lots of factors go into these recommendations; but the final question is always: Do I think anybody would want to *buy* this product? More specifically, do I think *enough* people will want to buy this to recoup our initial investment? Because, like it or not, this is a business, and we have to sell products to stay in business. Many corporations do extensive marketing research and test marketing of new products before they unleash them on the general public. In theory, this gives them hard evidence on which to base sound business decisions. It also gave us "New Coke."

Our approach is a lot simpler and, for us, pragmatic. We look at past experience, current trends, demographics ... and then we make a totally arbitrary, gut-level decision.

What's missing from this brilliant equation? You. You, the reader—you, the consumer—are the final arbiter in the marketplace. And since we don't have large sums of money to burn on elaborate questionnaires designed to elicit the innermost desires of a mathematically representative random sample of the comics-buying universe, we can only ask you to simply *tell* us what you want.

Which brings me to the real topic of this column: fan mail.

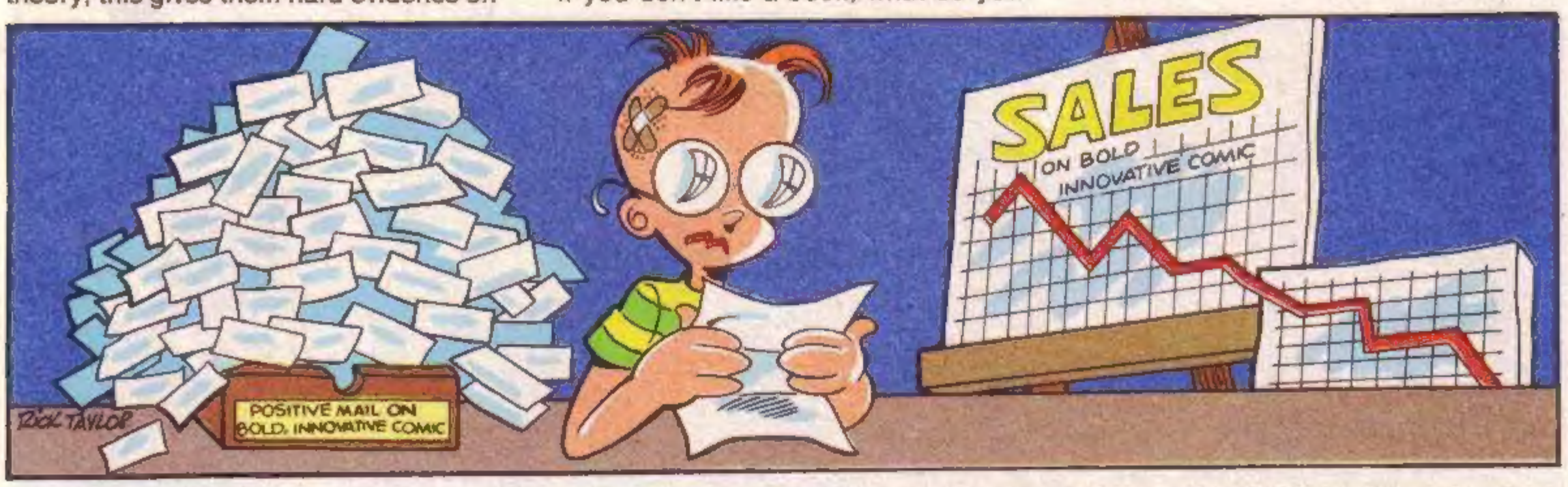
Fan mail is great. There's nothing like a pile of enthusiastic, gushing praise to get you off to a great start in the morning. Except maybe several cups of very strong coffee. But that's the problem with fan mail: it's 99% positive. People seem to write for two main reasons: 1) to make sure their favorite comics continue to be published, and 2) to get their letters published. There's nothing wrong with that; but it's hardly a reliable yardstick of prevailing public opinion. The number of letters we received praising **Mars** as a bold, innovative comic exceeded the total print run of the book.

If you don't like a book, what do you do? You stop buying it. What's it to you if there's some product out there you don't particularly care for? Nobody's going to force you to buy it. Why bother to write a letter about it? Unless, of course, it *replaces* something you *do* like. The Coca-Cola Company got hundreds of thousands of irrate letters not because people disliked "New Coke," but because they couldn't get "old Coke" anymore!

So what's the point? Are we suddenly going into the soft drink business? No, although I understand it pays a lot better. Wait a minute; this analogy is getting out of hand.

The point is this: We don't have the time or resources to produce an infinite variety of comics every month. Even if we did, retailers wouldn't have enough shelf space to display them all, and you wouldn't have enough money to buy them. And think of the devastation to our national forests! Hold on. That's not the point either. All I'm trying to say is: You *do* have a choice. If you don't like something we're publishing, tell us. Then tell us what you'd like to see instead. If you don't say anything, don't blame me if our next series is an adaptation of the complete works of Ayn Rand, complete with 2-D glasses to bring out the true depth of the author's original characterizations.

—Rick Oliver



FIRST IN JANUARY

Alter Ego #1: A brand new four-part limited series by **Roy Thomas** and **Ron Harris.**

Dynamo Joe #1: From the pages of **First Adventures**, the giant robot emerges in his own three-part limited series by **Doug Rice** and **John Ostrander.**

Hawkmoon: The Jewel in the Skull #1: A four-part Deluxe adaptation of the **Michael Moorcock** novel by **Gerry Conway, Rafael Kayanan**, and **Alfredo Alcala.**

American Flagg! #29: Part two of "The Fire This Time" by **Howard Chaykin, Joe Staton**, and **Hilary Barta.**

Badger #11: By **Mike Baron, Bill Reinhold**, and **Keith Wilson**. Plus: Boomtown by Baron, **Rick Stasi**, and **Gary Martin.**

Grimjack #22: By **John Ostrander, Tom Sutton**, and **Paul Guinan**. With a very special Munden's Bar story by Ostrander and *Camelot 3000* artist **Brian Bolland.**

Nexus #20: By **Mike Baron, Steve Rude**, and **John Nyberg**. Plus: Tales from the Clonezone by Baron, **Hilary Barta**, and **Rick Taylor.**

Jon Sable, Freelance #36: The new Deluxe adventures of Sable continue. Story and art by **Mike Grell**.

AN ACHIEVEMENT WORTHY OF GREAT PRAISE, LORD GRHADOL-- ESPECIALLY OF AN ALLY WE SO DEEPLY RESPECT AND HONOR.

FORGIVE MY LATENESS. IT IS MOST DEPLORABLE.

A LATENESS UNDERSTOOD AND ACCEPTED, ADMIRAL SHIMAMURA... AS IS THE DESIRE, THE *NEED* TO SHARE WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED.

BUT THERE IS ALSO *RESPONSIBILITY*. WHAT IS LEARNED CANNOT BE UNLEARNED. WE FEAR *OTHER USES* MAY BE DISCOVERED FOR THIS KNOWLEDGE--USES WE DID NOT *INTEND* AND THAT MIGHT COME BACK TO *HAUNT* US.

THESE ARE CONCERNS OF *ALL* HONORABLE, THINKING BEINGS. THE CONSEQUENCES OF WHAT WE DO OR DO *NOT* DO SHOULD ALWAYS BE CONSIDERED. THIS TAKES TIME.

TIME UNFORTUNATELY, IS WHAT WE LACK.

THE ENEMY IS ON THE MOVE. WE MUST MOVE SOON TO MEET HIM.

THIS IS OUR LAST LINE OF DEFENSE. WE CANNOT RISK ANOTHER MAJOR ENGAGEMENT BEYOND IT WITHOUT SERIOUS HARM TO CIVILIZED WORLDS. WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE YOU POSSESS WE HAVE NO HOPE.

WE UNDERSTAND. HAVING MADE OUR RRRESERVATIONS *KNOWN*, I AM NOW AUTHORIZED TO *RRELEASE* THE DATA TO YOU, MY *FRIENDS*.

@#★&% 'ALLIES'!

T-DECK (TECH/REPAIR/REFIT), 10th ROBOSOLDIER BATTALION, SPECTRE SQUADRON. NEW HOME OF THE BATTLESUIT DUBBED DYNAMO JOE AND ITS NEW PILOT-CORPORAL POMRU.

THIS ROOST IS RULED, HOWEVER, BY TECH OVER-SERGEANT KAETO.

GROWRR fiir RIAOWR fff! hiss! FRIAOWAWOW MIAOW WRAOW!

MIAOW MIAOW MIAOW MIAOW MIAOW, KAETO HURR-PURR. GROWL MIAOW RRR.*

*NOTE: MEANING IN TAVITANESE IS MOSTLY A MATTER OF TONE AND INFLECTION WHICH CANNOT BE EASILY PHONETICALLY REPRODUCED HERE. WHAT FOLLOWS IS AN EMOTIONALLY ACCURATE TRANSLATION OF WHAT IS BEING SAID.-J.O.

<YA GOLDURNED FLOPPY-EARED GALOOT! I DON'T CARE IF'N YER SOME GOL-BLAMED HE-RO! I DON'T CARE THAT THEY MADE YA THE FIRST TAVITAN PILOT EVER!

<I DON'T EVEN CARE THAT YA INSISTED ON HAVIN' BACK THAT CHEWED UP OL' BOT OF YOURS. WHAT I CARE ABOUT IS YER TWO WEEKS BEHIND THE REST IN GETTIN' IT REFIT AND MODIFIED AND I WON'T HAVE IT! YA HEAR?>

<WITH ALL DUE RESPECT TO THE OVER-SERGEANT...

<I AM SURE THE HONORED OVER-SERGEANT REALIZES THE TASKS MENTIONED WERE MEANT TO BE DONE BY BOTH MEMBERS OF A ROBOSOLDIER CREW. JUST AS I AM CERTAIN HE IS AWARE THAT I HAVE YET TO HAVE A TEAM-MATE ASSIGNED TO ME?>

<CREW-MEMBER OR NO CREW-MEMBER, IT AIN'T NO EXCUSE FER DOIN' SLOP WORK, YER GOL-BLAMED IDIOT!>

<SLOP?!>

<YA GOT YER SECONDARY ARMAMENT SYSTEM CROSSED WITH YER EMERGENCY ESCAPE REDUNDANCY! SOMEDAY YOU'LL GO FER YER CANNON AND FIND YERSELF POPPIN' OUT YER SUIT!

<WHAT WOULD YOU CALL IT?>

<I'D CALL IT .. 'SLOP.'

<SIGHHHHH... I'LL GET RIGHT ON IT, OVER-SERGEANT.>

SHORT WHILE LATER...

POMRU? YOU UP THERE?

HELLOOOOOO, TABBY!

ANDA! C'MOWRN UP!

WELL, WELL. CORPORAL POMRU! GAWD, IS THIS THE SAME TIN-CAN WE TRAVELLED IN?

YEP. JOE'S GETTIN' BROUGHT UP TO DATE. HOW YA LIKE HIS FACE-LEFT?

FACE LIFT, TABBY. GAWD, I DON'T KNOW. I ALWAYS KIND OF LIKED HIS SMILE.

UH-HUH. HEARD YER COMPANY MADE YA A RANK WAR CORRESPONDANT.

RANKING WAR CORRESPONDENT, PUH-LEASE!

HONESTLY, TABBY! I'M BEGINNING TO WONDER IF YOUR MISUSE OF TERRAN IS AS INNOCENT AS YOU *PRETEND!*

WHAT MISUSE?

LISTEN, WARREN-- I SAW THE PIECE YOU DID ON LIEUTENANT PRICE. I JUST WANTED TO SAY... WELL, YOU DONE RIGHT BY HIM.

HE GAVE HIS *LIFE* FOR ME, POMRU. I KNOW I'M A PAIN IN THE NECK SOMETIMES BUT I'M *NOT* UNGRATEFUL. I OWE A LOT TO *ALL* OF YOU.

HMMM... WHERE'S SERGEANT *PARO*, BY THE WAY?

YA GOT *ME* BY THE SHORT AND SQUIRRELIES, KID! I *AIN'T SEEN HIM!*

HE GOES TO MAKE HIS REPORTS TO THE *IMPERIUM* ABOUT TWO MONTHS BACK. I THINK HE WAS HOPING TO GET PROMOTED BACK INTA THE *OFFICERS'* CORPS.

AIN'T HEARD ONE WORD SINCE. NO CARD, NO LETTER, NO NOTHIN'. MAYBE THEM IMPIES GOT STRICTER REGS 'BOUT OFFICERS *FRACTURNIZING* WITH THE ENLISTED.

MAYBE I WAS JUST KIDDIN' MYSELF ABOUT ME AND TH' SARGE BEIN' BUDDIES.

OH, C'MAWN, POMRU. AFTER ALL YOU TWO'VE BEEN THROUGH? GIVE ME A *BREAK!*

SOMETHING HAS HIM TIED UP. THAT'S ALL. HE'LL BE BACK. YOU'LL SEE.

MEBBE. LISTEN, I GOTTA GET BACK T'WORK. THANKS FER STOPPIN' BY, THOUGH.

SEE YOU SOON.

BACK INTO THE OFFICERS' CORPS? HM! DO I SMELL A STORY BREWING?

HE IS A PRINCE OF THE BLOOD, A DIRECT OFFSPRING OF THE GLORIOUS AND ENIGMATIC MAGNA KHAN. HE IS ALSO TITULAR COMMANDER OF THE TOKEN IMPERIUM FORCE THE KHAN HAS SENT TO FULFILL HIS COMMITMENT TO THE ALLIANCE.

HIS NAME IS SHAETON— AND HE IS NOT HAPPY.

THEY ARE ALL OH SO RESPECTFUL! SHIMAMURA MAKES CERTAIN THAT ALL THE POLITE FORMS ARE *PUNCTILIOUSLY* CORRECT; SO THERE IS NO *OVERT* CAUSE FOR COMPLAINT.

AT EVERY *FORMAL* WAR COUNCIL HE IS MOST DEFERENTIAL AND COURTEOUS TO ME - AND *WHY NOT?* ALL THE *DECISIONS* HAVE ALREADY BEEN MADE AT THE *INFORMAL* MEETINGS -- MEETINGS TO WHICH I NEVER RECEIVE *PRIOR* KNOWLEDGE.

OUR *'ALLIES'* MISTRUST THE IMPERIUM-AND WHY NOT? MY FATHER SENDS ONLY THE *DREGS* OF OUR FORCES, AND EVERYONE *KNOWS* IT.

HE SEEMS TO MISTRUST MY *AMBITIONS*-AND WHY NOT? WHAT *HOPE* HAS A PRINCE FOR A THRONE WHEN HIS FATHER IS *IMMORTAL...?!*

AS I HAVE REPORTED FAITHFULLY *EVERY* DAY FOR THESE PAST TWO MONTHS, MY PRINCE.

PLEASE, MY PRINCE--MAY I KNOW HOW I MAY BEST SERVE YOU?

A *REWARD*, DARO? IS THAT WHAT YOU ARE ASKING FOR? WHAT REWARD IS *WORTHY* OF SO GREAT A *HERO* TO ALL THE ALLIANCE?

YES?

THE PLAT *EXPUNGED?* *RESTORATION* OF FORMER HONOR AND GLORY?

SERGEANT DARO REPORTS AGAIN, MY PRINCE, AS PER YOUR ORDER.

I SEEK NO REWARD, MY PRINCE-- ONLY TO DO MY *DUTY*, AS THE KHAN DIRECTS.

IT IS WELL, FOR NO *REWARD* SHALL YOU HAVE! NO PROMOTION, NO COMMENDATION, NO NOTICE HERE OR AT HOME FOR THIS OR ANYTHING ELSE YOU DO!

YOU *PRETEND* TO DO A SOLDIER'S HUMBLE DUTY, BUT THERE IS A *PRIDE* IN YOU THAT I SWEAR I SHALL *BREAK!*

GET OUT OF MY SIGHT!

WHAT?! SO GLUM, *SERGEANT* DARO?!

BOLAN!

I'M A DEAD MAN.

I HAVE NO *CAREER* SO LONG AS THE PRINCE IS SET AGAINST ME--AND WITHOUT A CAREER, NO *FUTURE* AMONG MY PEOPLE. WITHOUT MY PEOPLE I HAVE NO LIFE.

THE DEAD ARE *LUCKIER* THAN I.

CAPTAIN BOLAN, *SERGEANT* DARO! I [illegible] IMPORTANT SUCH DISTINCTIONS WERE TO YOU BEFORE, WHEN THE ROLES WERE *REVERSED!*

BUT BOLAN IS A DIFFERENT SORT OF MAN FROM YOU, *SERGEANT!* SUCH DIFFERENCES MEAN *NOTHING* TO BOLAN!

AND WHAT DOES THE CAPTAIN WISH OF ME?

WHAT?! DID THE PRINCE NOT TELL THE SERGEANT?

WE SPOKE ONLY OF... MY FUTURE, SIR.

YOU HAVE BEEN ASSIGNED TO MY COMMAND AND, IN MEMORY OF THE PAST WE HAVE SHARED, I HAVE A SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT FOR THE SERGEANT.

YOU HAVE HEARD OF THE NEW IMPERIUM BATTLESUIT BEING DEVELOPED?

YES, SIR. THE GALAX-C. BY REPORT IT WILL BE FOUR OR FIVE TIMES THE SIZE OF THE COMMAND CLASS, WITH CORRESPONDING POWER AND RANGE, SIR.

IS, SERGEANT, IS! THE PROTOTYPE IS COMPLETED! TRIALS ARE TO BEGIN IMMEDIATELY!

YOU, SERGEANT- YOU WE HAVE SELECTED TO BE THE TEST PILOT!

AN HONOR WORTHY OF A HERO, WOULDN'T YOU SAY?

THE DESTRUCTIVE POTENTIAL OF THE GALAX-C IS AWESOME; IT WILL NEVER BE MORE SO THAN DURING ITS FIRST FLIGHT. ANYTHING THAT CAN GO WRONG PROBABLY WILL. WHAT IS NEEDED IS NOT SO MUCH A PILOT AS A GUINEA PIG. SOMEONE EXPENDABLE.

FOR THE SECOND TIME THAT HOUR, DARO THINKS: "I AM A DEAD MAN."

THREE WEEKS LATER. THE FINAL TEST.

TEST? *PAH!* THEY RUN TESTS *PRIVATELY*. THIS IS MERELY A *DEMONSTRATION*, MEANT ONLY TO *IMPRESS* US.

HE'S A GOOD MAN, THAT PILOT I LIKE HIM. *CARO* IS HIS NAME, ISN'T IT?

WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, GENERAL, IT WILL BE THE FIRST TIME WE HAVE *DYNAMO* UNITS IN SUPPORT FORMATION, AS THEY WOULD BE IN BATTLE. WE WILL HAVE THE CHANCE TO GAUGE THE EFFECT OF THE *ENERGY SHROUD*.

MEMBERS OF THE *SPECTRE SQUADRON* WILL RENDEZVOUS WITH THE TEST UNIT *HERE* [redacted]*FORE* PROCEEDING TO THE TEST SITE. THE *GALAX-C* UNIT IS ON FULL AUTOMATIC, WITH ONLY THE PILOT ON BOARD. THE UNIT HAS BEEN PRE-SET TO RETURN TO ITS SILO *AFTER* THE TEST.

A HIGH RISK FACTOR WITH MANY VARIABLES, SIR.

ELANIAN?! WHAT IS *SHAETON* UP TO?

SIGMA TO HELLIONS OVERFLIGHT. IS THE TEST AREA CLEAR?

CHECK AND DOUBLE-CHECK, SIGMA. WISH McCANCE OVER THERE WAS AS CLEAN.

CUTE. RUST. OF COURSE, WE ALL KNOW *WHERE* YOU HIDE THE SOAP.

CAN THE CHATTER, CHILDREN. SIGMA, WE'LL TAKE ONE LAST RUN AROUND THE BLOCK AND THEN WE GO *BYE*.

WAR WALL TO TOWER. THE SHOW'S ALL YOURS. TAKE IT AWAY.

ASSUMING COMMAND, ROGER.

SPECTRE SQUADRON INTO INTERCEPT ORBIT.

DIALATE GALAX-C SILO OPENING AND PREPARE FOR LAUNCH. POWER UP UNIT ON MY SIGNAL.

NOW!

LAUNCH GALAX-C!

GALAX-C AWAY. ALL SYSTEMS CLEAN. COMING UP ON RENDEZVOUS POINT IN ZERO THREE POINT ONE SEVEN MINUTES.

COPY. PROCEED TO RENDEZVOUS AND THEN TO STAGING AREA! OVER!

AS THE KHAN COMMANDS: "EXPECT NO EXPLANATIONS--DO YOUR *DUTY* AND GLORY SHALL BE YOUR REWARD."

GLORY. NOT FOR ME.

ROGER.

THERE'S SOMETHING *STRANGE* GOING ON. *MODIFICATIONS* HAVE BEEN MADE ON THIS UNIT THAT DON'T GIBE WITH THE COMPUTER PRINTOUTS.

GALAX-C TO SPECTRE SQUADRON. ARE YOU READY TO PROCEED TO THE STAGING AREA?

HOLY TUNA! THAT'S SARGE!

VECTORING IN ON YA NOW, SARGE.

UH, SIR!

HAWKEYE TO SCATHER! WOULDJA LOOKIT THE *SIZE* OF THAT THING? I SUDDENLY FEEL LIKE A *97* TON WEAKLING!

HAW! IT GOES WELL! IT GOES *FLAWLESSLY!*

IF I *DARED*— OH, HOW I COULD MAKE THE EYES OF OUR MONGREL ALLIES *POP!*

WHY NOT? BY THE PRINCE'S *EXAMPLE*, I SHALL CHOOSE TO BE *BOLD!*

VITAMINS. I GOTTA START FEEDIN' MY 'BOT *VITAMINS!*

CLOSE UP YER MOUTHS *AND* YER FORMATION, YA SCHNABCRABBIN' ROOKIES! YER SUPPOSED TA BE FLYIN' IN FORMATION FER CRYIN' UP LOUD!

ATTENTION, GALAX-C! YOU WILL COMMENCE THE TEST AT MAXIMUM SURGE!

SIR, THAT IS BEYOND THE RECOMMENDED SAFETY STRESS PARAMETERS—!

THAT IS AN ORDER!

AS YOU COMMAND, SIR. ENGAGING LEECH GENERATORS...

NOW!

SPACE IS NOT THE VOID MANY CONCEIVE IT TO BE--IT'S AWASH WITH ENERGY-BORN OF RADIATION, GRAVITATION, LIGHT, HEAT, MAGNETISM-ALL AWAITING ONE WITH THE ABILITY TO TAP INTO IT.

AND TURN THAT ENERGY INTO POWER.

GREAT FLAMIN' HAIRBALLS!

STAY OUTTA THAT FIELD, BOYS, OR YOU'LL BE DUCK SOUP!

THE ENERGY COALESCES INTO A GLITTERING NIMBUS AROUND THE STEEL GIANT.

ENERGY SHROUD FORMED!

TARGET SIGHTED AND LOCKED ON! VECTORS ALIGNED!

RELEASING ENERGY... ON THE MARK...

NOW!

THE SHEER DESTRUCTIVE POWER OF THE ENERGY SHROUD OBLITERATES THE UNMANNED TARGET WITH PINPOINT ACCURACY.

BUT THERE IS A DANGER TO THAT POWER AS WELL.

BACKLASH! SURGE IN FEEDBACK MODE!

IT'S BURNING THROUGH HIS SHIELDS!

SPECTRE SQUAD LEADER TO SIGMA! THE GALAX-C's BURNING UP!

JOE TO GALAX-C! ARE YOU OKAY IN THERE?

SARGE!

YARRRRGH!

...MAYDAY...! SYSTEM OVERLOAD... UNIT OUT OF CONTROL...!

SIGMA! ENERGY SHROUD'S FEEDIN' ON THE 'BOT!

IT'S PEELIN' HIS SKIN LIKE A GRAPEFRUIT!

THE ARCING ENERGY TWISTS AWAY PLATES OF HIGH-TENSILE STEEL...

...EXPOSING SENSITIVE CIRCUITRY BELOW...

...AND WREAKING HAVOC UPON IT!

ZAK! Schrak!

ABORT! ORDER THE FOOL TO ABORT THE TEST!

PILOT UNABLE TO RESPOND. INDICATES INCAPACITATED.., OR DEAD.

AUTOMATIC RECALL SEQUENCE OPERATIVE AND INITIATED, SIR.

WHAM!

BACK YOU ROOKIES! YER STANDIN' TOO CLOSE!

AHR, ROWWZBAG! SIGMA, THIS IS SPECTRE SQUAD LEADER! TWO OF MY UNITS'VE BEEN INCAPACITATED!

AND JUMBO'S HEADED IN YER DIRECTION LIKE A BAT OUTTA HELSINKI!

IT'S COMING AT FULL SPEED!

HIT THE DESTRUCT BUTTON!

NO RESPONSE, SIR. THE CIRCUIT IS PROBABLY BURNED OUT.

GIVEN PRESENT COURSE AND SPEED, THE GALAX-C WILL DESTROY ONE-THIRD OF SIGMA BASE WHEN IT STRIKES.

ALERTING THE PRINCE AND DEFENSIVE MISSLE BATTERIES, SIR.

SPECTRE SQUAD LEADER, WHAT IS THE STATUS OF DAMAGED UNITS?

AWR, THE CREWS ARE OKAY, BUT THEIR SUITS ARE BUST! GONNA NEED A TOW.

I'M GOING AFTER THAT RUNAWAY GALAX-C.

POWER UP!

NEGATIVE, SPECTRE LEADER! GET YOUR 'BOT OUT OF THERE! INITIATING *SATURATION MISSILE STRIKE!*

NIK, SIGMA! HOLD YER FIRE! THAT'S MY *BUDDY* IN THAT SUIT AND I'M GETTIN' HIM OUT!

THIS IS A DIRECT ORDER, SQUAD-LEADER! STAND AWAY! YOUR UNIT ISN'T BUILT TO CATCH THE GALAX-C.

DID NOT COPY, SIGMA. ENERGY THINGUS MAKIN' STATIC. RANGE: 2000 KLIKS AND CLOSING. DO YOU READ ME?

OVER-SARGE AKETO HERE. I READ YA, VARMINT, AND WE'RE GONNA PICK OVER YER SUIT WHEN YA GET BACK!

OOK!

AKIRA, GIVE THE TAVITAN HIS CHANCE! MISSILE FIRE NOW DESTROYS BOTH UNITS!

AND WE LOSE TWO LIVES AGAINST HOW MANY IF THE TAVITAN FAILS AND THE GALAX-C STRIKES SIGMA?

I HAVE NO CHOICE. COMMENCE COUNTDOWN.

IMPACT IN SIXTY SECONDS. MISSILE LIFT-OFF-- T-MINUS THIRTY SECONDS AND COUNTING...

TWENTY-FIVE...

HAIRBALLS!

C'MON, JOE! WE GOTTA DO IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME! YOU AND ME, BUDDY!

...TWENTY SECONDS...

DO IT FER DADDY!!!

...FIFTEEN SECONDS...

GUIDANCE SYSTEM OUT! NOW FER THE EASY PART!

...TEN SECONDS...

...NINE...
...EIGHT...
...SEVEN...

BONSAI! PORT ENGINE OUT!

...SIX...

HOLD YER CAMELS, SCHNABCRABBERS, AND OPEN YER EYES!

HE'S MISSIN' YA! GONNA GO LOOP-DE-WHOOP UNTIL YA CAN GET TO HIM. IT'S OKAY!

MISSLE SYSTEMS, STAND DOWN.

RESCUE TEAMS INTERCEPT AND SHUT DOWN THE RUNAWAY ROBOT. MEDICAL UNITS TAKE THE INJURED PILOT AS IMPERIUM TECH TEAMS SPIRIT THE GALAX-C BACK TO ITS BASE.

THE EMERGENCY IS OVER. THE TEST IS A QUALIFIED SUCCESS--BUT THE POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS ARE JUST BEGINNING.

THANKS TO YOUR *BLUNDERING*, BOLAN, I HAVE LOST THE CHANCE FOR *PERSONAL* GLORY THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN MINE HAD THE TEST SUCCEEDED WITH MY OWN *PERSONAL* MODIFICATIONS IN THE GALAX-C. GLORY I *NEED* TO ACHIEVE MY GOALS.

WE WERE *FORTUNATE* TO BE ABLE TO *REMOVE* THOSE MODIFICATIONS BEFORE THE INQUIRY BOARD INSPECTED THE UNIT. FORTUNATE ALSO THAT DARO HAS BEEN *CONVICTED OF INCOMPETENCE* ONCE BEFORE AND GAVE US A HANDY *GOAT* FOR THIS FIASCO.

DISMISS HIM FROM IMPERIUM SERVICE AND THEN REPORT FOR YOUR *NEW* ASSIGNMENT, *SERGEANT* BOLAN!

...S-SERGEANT...?

OF *COURSE* IT IS A LIE, SERGI, BUT IT IS A LIE WE *MUST* LET *STAND* FOR *POLITICAL* REASONS!

AND TWO *GOOD* SOLDIERS *MUST SUFFER* FOR IT. THIS STICKS IN MY *CRAW*, AKIRA!

THE ADMIRAL HAS ARRANGED SOMETHING FOR THEM THAT WILL *SOFTEN* THE STING A LITTLE, GENERAL.

BUT THE PRINCE'S *DEEDS* DO NOT REFLECT THE KHAN'S *WILL*. SHAETON BEARS *WATCHING*.

FAGIZMURIZAFUDDA! *BUSTED*?! IS THIS ANY WAY TO TREAT A *HERO*?!

OKAY, SO MAYBE I *DID* DISOBEY A DIRECT ORDER! BUT I *SAVED* THE *DAY*!

ROWRZBAGGIN' *INGRATES*! AND *NOW* THEY FIND ME A TEAM-MATE! PROB'LY SOME FOOPIN' FUZZ-FACED LI'L KNOW-NOTHIN', STRAIGHT OUTTA THE *LITTER BOX*...!

AHEM.

PRIVATE POMRU? I'M YOUR NEW *PILOT*.

SARGE!

YOU HAVE THE SUIT ALL UPDATED AND MODIFIED, I SEE.

OH *YEAH*, SARGE! JOE'S *BETTER'N* EVER! THEY MADE ME TAKE OUT MY... ERW, 'IMPROVEMENTS'--LEASTWISE, ALL THEY COULD *FIND*! BUT HE'S REAL *NEAT*!

WE WILL TALK ABOUT THOSE 'IMPROVEMENTS', PRIVATE. I'M SOMEWHAT *LEERY* OF *UNAPPROVED* MODIFICATIONS LATELY.

THEY TELL ME IT WAS *YOU* WHO SAVED MY LIFE, POMRU. THANK YOU.

FER *YOU*, SARGE? *ANYTIME*!

NOW LEMME TELL YA 'BOUT THESE BUNCHA SCHNABCRABBIN' *ROOKIES* THEY SADDLED US WITH...

LATER...

TROIKA TO PRISON SHIP *TITAN*. INITIATING DOCKING MODE. OVER.

ROGER, TROIKA. WELCOME ABOARD, GENERAL IPPOLITOV.

YOU ARE THE PRISONER, DA? GOOD. I WILL BE BLUNT. YOU HAVE BEEN CONVICTED OF MUTINY AND MURDER, EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES NOTWITHSTANDING.

NORMALLY, YOU WOULD BE TAKEN OUT AND SHOT.

HOWEVER, I AM GOING TO OFFER YOU AN ASSIGNMENT. IF YOU TAKE IT AND SUCCEED AND LIVE TO TELL ABOUT IT, YOU WILL BE EXONORATED OF ALL PAST CRIMES, YOUR RANK RESTORED, AND POSSIBLY YOU GET COMMAND OF YOUR OWN.

INTERESTED?

FASCINATED.

PLEASE, GENERAL, TELL ME MORE. I AM AT YOUR DISPOSAL.

TM

NEXT MONTH: BOLDSHOT BRIMFIRE!